

# Samskāras (संस्कार) – An Overview of Vedic Sanskars

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## Introduction

The **Samskāras** (Sanskrit: संस्कार, Saṃskāra; Hindi: **Sanskar**), are **rites of passage**. The nearest English word to “Sanskars” is “sacraments”. Sanskars are rituals through which the life of a person receives holiness or becomes better and more worthy of greater respect. The **Samskāra** are a series of sacraments, sacrifices and rituals that serve as *rites of passage* for all Hindus and mark the various stages of the human life and to signify entry to a particular Ashram. All human beings are born as **Shudra** (Sanskrit: शूद्र *Śūdra*), and one is elevated to the status of Dvija (twice-born i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya) through the performance of these **Samskāra** and in particular, the **upanayanam** (उपनयनम्), **Samskāra** and the individual's personal dutiful dedication to excellence. Basically, all these rituals are of the nature of purification, and they remove one's tendencies to commit sins (pāpa, transgressing God's Laws) and/or bestow good qualities (gunas).

**Sanskar** is a commonly used variant of the Sanskrit word '**Samskāra**' and signifies cultural heritage and upbringing in modern Hindi.

Apart from the practices, the word "Samskāra" is used in communication denoting the upbringing criteria of a Hindu - It is said that a child/person with good Samskāra does right and it is supposed that s/he will not fall in sin, i.e. Lust, Anger and Wine. It may be concluded that Samskāra is a word to denote the qualitative quality among Hindus.

Each important milestone of a Human life is to be celebrated by undertaking a particular Samskāra wherein the significance of that milestone is ritualistically conveyed. Although, the number of major samskāras fluctuates between 12 and 18 in the *Grhya Sutras*, later, it became 16 (Hindi: sola) in number, generally known as "Shodasha Sanskaras" (Ṣoḍaśa Saṃskāra). However, some Hindus have up to about 54 samskārs which are observed. Sixteen sacraments have been specified by Vedic teaching and involve the various important events in a person's life. They extend from the moment of conception until death.

The origin of Vedic sacraments is in the four Vedas from where the verses of prayers have been extracted. The sacraments were observed by custom from the Vedic period but later they were written in book form so that people could refer to it easily. ***The Vedas declare that what is purified through the process of sacraments in this world becomes pure and blessed and whatever is not thus purified and blessed is impure in this world.***

The sixteen sacraments, beginning with conception and ending with the performance of last rites after death, are summarized below. These sacraments are performed by a Pandit (priest), with sufficient knowledge in the rituals of these Vedic sacraments. The sacraments are very ably described in the book “Sanskar Vidhi” (Procedure for Sacraments) written by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Unless indicated otherwise, wife sits on right side of husband.

## 1. Garbhādhān (गर्भाधान) Sanskar (Conception)

Garbhā'dhāna (wife sits on left side; literally, gifting the womb), for the act of conception. This is the first sacrament which should follow immediately after every matrimonial union. This sacrament is performed before the husband and wife join in the act of impregnation. The purpose is to obtain a good, healthy, spiritually upright/cultured child. The procedure involves the performance of Havan (fire sacrifice) and special prayers are said requesting God for auspiciousness and purification in every way for the child desired by the couple.

## 2. Punsavan (पुंसवन) Sanskar (Conception confirmed)

Punsavana) (literally: instilling vigor in the fetus **not** engendering a male issue) The Punsavan sacrament is performed in the second or third month when it is known that conception has taken place. This sacrament ensures a healthy period of pregnancy and birth of a strong and normal child. Havan is performed and special prayers are said accordingly.

## 3. Sīmantonnayana (सीमन्तोन्नयन) Sanskar (Development of mental powers)

Sīmanto'nnayana (literally: parting the hair) is the third Vedic Sacrament and is performed when the pregnancy of the mother is fairly well established; it is performed during the fourth, sixth and eighth months of pregnancy during the bright fortnight with **Nakshatra** having masculine names (**Punarvasu, Pushya, Shravana, Mriga-shiras**, etc.). It is aimed at the integral growth and development of the fetal brain and its mental processes, as well as at the mental and physical well-being of the mother.

The healthy development of the mental faculties can only occur if the mother herself is in sound physical and mental health. Therefore, in a Vedic family, all possible measures are taken to provide a congenial environment for a sound healthy development of the mother and child.

We all know that when we plant a seed in fertile soil it is with the intention for it to grow into a healthy plant and bear fruits it was intended to bear - provided we dutifully nurture it with water, manure and the right types of chemical fertilizers. In a similar manner, the child in the mother's womb also requires consistent nourishment through psychological and spiritual endowments and proper food/drink intake by the mother to enable him/her to attain the maximum developments in brain, mental and psychic faculties. The Sīmantonnayan sacrament is directed towards these attainments.

The Vedic scriptures say that when the child (fetus) is four months old in the mother's womb it begins to develop its mental faculties; and by the fifth month, its perceptive faculties (sense organs) are fairly well developed. By the sixth month the intellectual faculties begin to develop. During the seventh month the fetal body parts are well developed and defined. And beginning in the eighth month and through to the end of the ninth month, the intuitive faculties and ability to differentiate and respond become comparatively functional; and the hormones that have been in the embryonic forms in the earlier stages have now comparatively attained their functional endowments and virility, and the child is now ready to respond appropriately to the stimulations of the external world when born. Therefore, it is crucial that this sacrament is performed for the sound and healthy development of the child's mind and the physical body.

It is highly recommended that during these months of the pregnancy the mother herself is fairly well exposed to a healthy environment, both for her psychological well-being and for her spiritual satisfaction. The active support of the family members and relatives in creating this congenial atmosphere is very imperative.

The way the mother maintains her visual likings and appreciations, and the subsequent thoughts that emanate from these visual perceptions, all have a direct bearing on the growing fetal mind. She should always utilize all her perceptual faculties (the five sensory organs) to gain positive values and knowledge and to reject and dispel ignorance. It is essential that the pregnant mother always endeavors to keep herself in an environment which generates honesty and transparency, congeniality, love and understanding; and her daily activities have the embodiment of sacrificial motives. These are all positive attributes and have direct positive bearings on the psychological and spiritual development of the child to be born.

#### 4. Jāta-Karma (जातकर्म) Sanskar (THE NEW BORN)

Jātakarma (literally, natal rites), is the fourth sacrament and it is performed immediately after the child is born (for convenience this sanskar may be done with the **Naamkaran sanskar**. However, family may opt to have at least one special mantra chanted prior to delivery).

Whereas the first three sacraments deal with the mother's mental and psychic attributes as well as the parental hereditary endowments, the fourth and the remainder of the sacraments bear direct relationship with the child's environment, be it at home or beyond the home.

As has been stated in the previous issues, the purpose of the sacraments is to endow the growing child with human positive values and to influence and inspire the child towards attainment of noble characteristics and behaviors. The ultimate aim is to create a society of exemplary qualities wherein the growing child has the capabilities to play an active role.

At birth the child's mouth, nose, ears and the whole body are cleansed. This activity stimulates the child's five perceptual functions - hearing, vision, smell, taste and touch. The child is then bathed in fresh water, the body is dried with a clean piece of cloth, and attired with new set of clothes. At the completion of this cleansing process, the child is ready to receive the JAAT KARMA sacrament. The father then takes hold of the child and sits at the HAVAN-YAJ (fire sacrifice) officiated by a Vedic priest.

If the child has taken birth at the hospital then the Havan-Yaj and the sacrament should be performed the day the mother and the child return home. The performance of the Havan-Yaj itself has a purifying effect on the mother, child as well as the home and its environment.

Following the Yaj, the father proceeds to inscribe the word "AUM" on the tongue of the new born with the blunted end of a small golden skewer dipped in a mixture of honey and ghee. AUM is the universal name of the all-pervasive God.

The father then softly and clearly speaks the word '**Om TvamVedo'si**' into the child's right ear. This means: "You are an intelligent human being; and not an unintelligent being - you will accept VIDYA (knowledge) in its entirety and dispel AVIDYA (ignorance) completely".

Other blessing mantras are also uttered in both ears.

By performing this sacrament the parents become conscious of their undertakings and responsibility to mould the growing child into a worthy person and to provide the child with an education so that in later years the person has the ability and capability to discriminate between good and evil deeds and to accept a righteous path.

Psychologists maintain that whatever education is provided to the child during the first five years of the child's life it becomes his/her life-long legacy. The Vedic literature is in complete accord with this philosophy.

For the first five years the child stays in an environment which had already been created and molded by the parents - that is, the home becomes the initial environment where the child grows and is nurtured.

The behavioral attitudes of the parents have a direct bearing on the child's behavior and attitudes; if the parents lead a virtuous exemplary life, the child will copy these positive values for his/her own advancements; but if the parents indulge in worldly ways of alcohol, harmful drugs, lies, gossip, night parties and nightclubs etc., the child will inherit these negative values and eventually will end up with sorrowful days and early death.

During the Jaat Karma sacrament, the responsibility which the parents had undertaken upon themselves had inadvertently placed an equal and even accountability on the child. When the growing child realizes in his adulthood the relentless loving efforts undertaken by his/her parents to mould him/her into a worthy person, he/she becomes duty-bound to fulfill this "spiritual-pact" and gladly accepts the moral obligations inherent therein.

We are aware that the child at the infant age is devoid of any mental comprehension as to the sacrament performed on him / her; nonetheless, the sacrament has created an immense psychic impact and is a constant reminder to the growing adolescent whenever similar sacraments are witnessed by him/her. It is maintained that vocalizing the sacred mantras in the child's ears and the vibrations so created in the child's mental processes has an uncanny spiritual effect on the psychic development of the person. The growing person becomes adamantly faithful to this/these mantra(s) as his/her very own (and not belonging to any other person). This person's spiritual behavior is thus further reinforced and is reflected in his/her attitudes, articulations and orations.

## 5. The Nāma-Karana (नामकरण) Sanskar

### (THE NAMING OF THE NEW-BORN)

Nāmakaraṇa (literally, naming). This is the fifth Vedic Sacrament and as the name of the sacrament implies it is accomplished for the naming of the new-born.

#### The Vedic Philosophy leading up to this sacrament

The Vedic sacraments as have been previously stated, are special spiritual prayers to the Omnipresent Protector wherein we seek His grace and guidance in modifying our lives with spiritual and ethical attributes and noble social behaviors.

A newly-wed couple has many ideas and aspirations in the establishment of a happy and prosperous family.

They now recall their own steps taken in keeping the whole process as holy as possible.

They had faithfully performed the **Garbhādhāna**, sacrament for conception. In the days following the conception they had refrained from indulgences and had followed the rules of celibacy. They spent their leisure hours in religious fellowships. They had the priest perform the **punsavanam** sacrament at the second month of the pregnancy in the presence of the family members, relatives and well-wishers. The vows thus were renewed.

They further recall that on the fourth, sixth and eight months the **simantonayan** sacraments were performed for the welfare of the mother as well as the child in the womb. Throughout the pregnancy the tempo of the religious fellowships were enhanced. They had maintained honesty and transparency in all their activities which again had the embodiment of sacrificial motives. They gave donations in kind and in money to the needy and poor. They also gave due respect to the elders. These are positive values. At the birth of the new-born the **Jaat**

**Karam** sacrament was accomplished with the father of the family-unit leading the ceremony.

With arrival of the child efforts were made to further improve the physical, psychological and religious environments to allow for the attainment of positive values as much as possible.

Such were their personal accounts, and with these glad feelings they are now making all the due preparations for the **Naam Karan** Sanskar.

They wish for a name which in a nut shell very adeptly would reflect their own inner feelings and would then become a beacon for the growing child to follow the chosen path. Whenever his/her name would be called out affectionately, the very sound of that name would ring the bells for a chain reaction in his/her mental processes for positive responses. The intensity of such responses would gain with age and eventually a personality would take shape which would then be endeared by all around him/her. These are some of the reasons why in the Vedic culture and philosophy the accomplishment of Naam Karan Sanskar is so vital and significant.

**What is in a name?** The letters in a word create the name, which in turn spells out the meaning of that name. All names have either a positive or a negative effect, depending upon the word chosen. One should remember that this particular name, this very name, would

become the life-long identification mark of that person. Therefore it is imperative that an utmost of intelligence and wisdom is exercised to choose this name and assistance should be sought from the learned and the wise.

### **The choice of a name**

The choice of a name is of immense significance. In our choices we visualize a situation -a word- where all our aspirations are encased. The name when uttered should have the weight and authority to impinge an effect. The loudness of the name so uttered would also signal a message to all around in the family, relatives, all well-wishers and members of the community, that a person of certain characteristics is now a focus of attention among them. There is a sense of a proclamation to all and sundry to hear and listen. In the growing child himself / herself there is intensity of reaction to this loudness of the name so uttered. The Vedic scriptures state that this very name then has the potentials of molding a person's character and personality. Due diligence should be exercised when choosing a name. Name should not resemble and represent the name of animals, trees, rivers, flowers or any material object. Names should have connotations of high ideals and aspirations, which in addition to identifying the child with ease, should also create in him /her, a sense of immense responsibility.

The name chosen should be easy and gentle, and which could be easily and readily pronounced. A name with many syllables is inappropriate and becomes cumbersome in pronunciation. The name may thus be wrongly emphasized giving a distorted hearing perception.

### **The Choice of an Auspicious Day for the Naam Karan Sanskar**

The "Sanskar Vidhi" text clearly stipulates the timing of the sacrament. There are three different times but the importance is given to the first one. It should be performed on the eleventh day (counting as day one - the day the child was born); on one hundred and one days later; or on the first anniversary of the child.

Eleventh Day: If the birth had been normal without any ill effect to the mother - assuming that the child is well and healthy and the mother can actively participate in this ceremony.

One Hundred and One days: When the mother has some physical and mental failings and illness, it is envisaged that she will be well at the end of three months.

On the First Anniversary: There are occasions when the parents would prefer a larger number of relatives from distant places to arrive, and they would be able to meet the deadline on the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary.

It is very important that the Naam Karan Sacrament should be accomplished as soon as possible so that the psychic impact is maximized as early as possible; and the process of identifying the child by name becomes practical and unhindered. Without a proper name others begin to give odd names and / or nicknames and this process creates adverse psychic impact. And when the proper name is given much later in time some adverse psychological reactions tend to develop due to the change in the name. That is why it is prudent to have this sacrament accomplished on the 11<sup>th</sup> day.

It is observed that even after the Naam Karan Sacrament, nicknames are given and sometimes it is more than one nickname. This attitude is not appropriate and for obvious reasons the effect of the real name is nullified and the whole purpose of the Naam Karan Sacrament is defeated and will lead to deleterious = harmful effect on the child's mind. It is prudent to seek the assistance of the learned and wise people in the community when the choice of name is made.

The day the Sacrament is to be performed there should be rejoicing all around, and everyone should be happy and in joyful mood. Relatives, friends and well-wishers should be invited and welcomed accordingly with seating arrangements and provided with refreshments and food.

For the sanskar proper, the mother brings the child to the **Yajna Vedi**, with the child in her hands, she passes from behind the father, comes to his right side, and hands him the child, **keeping the child's head to the North**. The father is now seated on the right side of the mother - this procedure places the father in the leading role in this Sacrament as laid down in the "Sanskar Vidhi" text. The ceremony is officiated by the Vedic Pandit/priest. The father joins in the performance of the Havan -Yaj, and on indication by the Pandit/ priest, the father announces the chosen name. It is important that the meaning of the name and its subsequent significance is properly understood by the parents, family members, the relatives and friends. As the child grows, the subtle meanings of the name are made known to him /her, and this measure should be repeated on various occasions to have a meaningful effect on the child.

## **6. Nishkramana (निष्क्रमण) Sanskar** (Taking child out in fresh air)

Nishkramaṇa, literally first outing, is the sixth sacrament. 'Nishkraman' means to take outside (the house). Until now the child was being raised within the four walls of the house. The child will not always remain within the closed environment of the house but has to move outside the house as well. If the true meaning of this sacrament is understood, and it is appreciated that the objective is to give emphasis on the importance of the air we breathe which is charged with solar energy, and further, that the child has to be brought out of a lower level of living into the natural healthy environment, then Nishkraman sacrament is no less important than any other sacrament.

### **The Time for Performance of Nishkraman Sacrament**

The child, if healthy and well, should be taken out of the house into the sun two months after birth, however if the child is weak then the timing should be three months after birth. If the child is taken out earlier, then the child is likely to be adversely affected by the heat or cold. The reason for including Nishkraman sacrament as part of the sixteen sacraments is to ensure that parents pay attention to it. Just as several rules are made for maintenance of good health on reaching the stage of youth, such as morning exercises, playing football (outdoor games) in the afternoon so as to maintain strong body, in the same way as soon as the child is born it has been made necessary through sacrament that two or three months after birth the child should not remain in the closed environment of the house but enjoy the 'clean air' and the beautiful sunshine outside.

Physiologists say that for the balanced development of our body it is necessary for calcium and phosphorous to be absorbed. A person becomes restless and irritable in proportion to the amount of calcium lacking in the blood. Without Vitamin D, calcium would not be absorbed in the body. Neither milk nor curd contains Vitamin D, unless added. It is available naturally in sunlight, hence it is necessary to expose the body to sunlight so that there is no weakness due to lack of Vitamin D and also that calcium and phosphorous are absorbed by the body through the effect of sunlight.

### **The importance of viewing the sun**

The universe is controlled by two elements -heat and cold. In the material sense, the heat in the body is the sign of life, the cooling of the body is a sign of loss of life energy. From a psychological view point the movement of the mind is a sign of mental power and the immobility of the mind is a sign of mental weakness. Therefore the child is exposed to the sun as soon as he/she takes the first step in life, so that the child becomes mobile and active like the sun.

## The importance of viewing the moon

The moon provides coolness. Excessive heat can be damaging. From a psychological point of view, thinking at a very high pace can produce mental disorder. Therefore, mentally impaired persons are sometimes called moonstruck or lunatic. In English 'lunar' means 'moon'. After viewing the moon water is taken in the palm and then thrown down on the ground. The act of throwing the water downwards means that mental disorders resulting from the effect of the moon are pushed away downwards. Water can take any shape, in the same way the mind is influenced by the environment. The mind should only indulge in positive thinking, just as the sun's positive action converts water into vapor and raises it. Discard lowly feelings, just as we throw down the water from the palm-this is the meaning of all these proceedings.

## 7. Annaprāshana (अन्नप्राशन) Sanskar (Feeding cooked food)

Annaprāśana also known as *annaprashana vidhi*, *annaprasan*, or *Anna-prasanam*, is the seventh sacrament. Ann-Prashan means eating solid food for the first time in life. The child receives the mother's milk as soon as he/she is born. At that time the child has no teeth to chew food nor is the child in a position to digest the solid food. For that time God has, therefore, arranged for the type of food that is suitable for the child during that period. God's creation is such that not only has He provided the food, He has also ensured that it is readily available with the mother.

The question now arises as to how long should the child be dependent on the mother's milk, bearing in mind the mother's health and the need to maintain the child's health as well.

**1. From the Mother's point of view** - Calcium is the main health giving element in milk. Feeding the baby with mother's milk means the mother is giving away calcium from her body to the child. This means that for as long as she continues to feed the child with her milk she will continue to become weak in calcium. This is the reason why those mothers who continue to feed their child for a long period become weak. Nature has itself decided on the duration of feeding. When the child starts teething then it should be understood that the time for chewing food is drawing near. In that case the mother should herself reduce breast feeding and concentrate on giving solid foods.

It is often seen that many mothers do not pay attention to this, become weak and yet continue to breast feed the child. Anna-Prashan has been made a part of religion because of this, so that at the appropriate time the mother should stop breast feeding and give attention to feeding the child with solid foods so that her health may also be maintained. By determining it as a sacrament the mother is forced to concentrate on it, otherwise when neighbors see the mother breast feeding the child after the time for Anna-Prashan has passed, they would question as to whether Anna-Prashan Sacrament of the child had been done. From the mother's viewpoint the importance of Anna-Prashan is the protection of her body.

**2. From the child's view point** - There is no doubt that milk has all types of health giving elements, but nature has not made us to live on milk alone. For as long as milk is required and the stomach is soft, the child does not have teeth, however when the stomach strengthens and is able to digest solid food, then the child starts teething so that the child can chew solid food and eat to survive.

The child should not be brought off milk onto solid foods completely. In the beginning the child is able to take milk only, however after Anna-Prashan sacrament the child is able to take milk as well as solid foods. At the time of teething the child is in an uneasy state.

**Procedure** - According to Sanskar Vidhi, after conducting Havan, the child should be fed with a little boiled rice mixed with yoghurt, honey and ghee after reciting the following mantra- **OM ANN PATE ANNASYA NO DEHYANAMIWASYA SHUSHMINAH. PRA PRA DATARAM TARISH URJAM NO DHEHI DWIPADE CHATUSHPADE.** Yajurved 11/83. O God the giver of food! May You provide us with healthy and energy producing food. Grant happiness to those that give food in charity. May this food provide energy to all living beings.

## **8. Cūḍākaraṇa (चूड़ाकरण) Sanskar (HEAD SHAVING)**

Cūḍākaraṇa literally means arrangement of the hair tuft or the **Mundana** (literally, tonsure). This is the eighth sacrament. In Sanskrit the word “chura” means “choti” or a small bundle of hair that is made to stick out from the topmost part of the head. The word “jura” in Hindi is the distorted form of the Sanskrit word “chura”.

### **Cūḍākaraṇa is usually connected with teething**

Churakarm sacrament may be performed at either of these two times-either at the end of the first year or in the third year. The reason for the first and three years is that a child starts teething from the age of six to seven months and the teeth continue to grow until the child is two and a half to three years old. A child has two teething times- at first the child has milk teeth and when these break away the child has the second teething which remain permanent. Milk teeth are twenty in number and permanent teeth that grow after this are thirty two in number. On reaching the age of one year a child has eight teeth- four above and four below. On reaching one and a half years the child has twelve teeth, in one and a half to two years sixteen teeth and in two to two and a half, three years twenty teeth. The teeth come out in gaps. At first the bottom teeth appear. After this nature has given time for rest before the next teeth come out, so that the child does not suffer continuous pain.

During the teething period the head becomes heavy, is hot, there is headache, the gums become painful, there is dripping of saliva, diarrhea sets in, the child passes out green-yellow watery waste matter and becomes very irritable. Teeth have a great effect on the head, therefore to keep the head light and cool the hair is shaved, thus removing its weight from the head; this is the objective of Churakarm.

### **The Relationship of Cūḍākaraṇa Sanskar with the Brain**

All parts of the body are just as important from the point of view of their functions. However, the brain is regarded as of paramount importance. The brain is divided into two parts - Cerebrum and Cerebellum. Both these parts of the brain are the centre of knowledge and action. The five senses of knowledge and the five senses of action are activated by them. All this machinery is inside the skull. The skull covering the brain has a number of parts which do not join up properly during childhood. The joining of these parts is called “asthi sandhi” or joining of the bones. The bones of the skull do not join properly before three years of age and it is for this reason that child has hairs on the head even during pregnancy so that the hairs protect the skull and that the brain remains protected also.

After three years the bones of the skull join together and therefore the time is right for removing the hair from the head. The reasons for shaving the hair which until now had protected the skull and hence the brain, are as follows:-

#### **1. Removal of dirty hair**

The hair grows on the child's head during pregnancy and thus remains dirty water. The shaving of these dirty hairs with a razor is therefore necessary. This is why the head is shaved. These hairs should only be kept for as long as the bones of the skull have not joined together. Because the bones join together in three years there is no benefit in keeping the hairs after this.



2. Protection from itches, etc.

The keeping of the hair leads to diseases such as itching/scabies, lice, etc. Removal of the hair prevents the child from having these diseases. Removal of the hair ensures that the child's head is cleaned well.

3. Protection from heavy headedness

Keeping of the hair leads to headache, heat, etc. Therefore, the head should be shaved.

4. Helps the growth of new hair

The shaving of hair promotes the growth of new hair. Shaving the hair with the razor and its movement on the head two or three times strengthens the roots of the hairs and helps the new hair to grow long and strong.

### **Procedure for Shaving of Hair**

Special items for this sacrament

Curd, for rubbing on the head, comb, scissors or razor which should be sterilized in boiling water (or new electric shaver), "kush" grass for holding the hair, kneaded sharps for picking the hairs, warm water for bathing the child, clothing for the child and toys.

*The wife should sit on the left hand side of the husband on the "yajna vedi" and the child should sit either in the mother's lap or in between the parents. Conduct 'vishesh yajna' and then shave the hair from the head. After carrying out various activities as prescribed in the Sanskar Vidhi the father of the child should first cut the hair, using a scissors, from the right side in four positions by holding it with 'kush' grass. Similarly he should cut the hair from the left side in four positions. After this he should cut the hair from the front in four positions and the back in four positions.*

After completing the above the father says to the barber to wet the child's head with warm water with his soft hands, and carefully shave the hair from the child's head without injuring the child. When the shaving is complete then pick up all the hairs with kneaded sharps and bury it in the ground in the jungle. Do not throw the hair in the river, it will pollute the water and can cause diseases. After shaving, rub some curd on the head with the hands, bathe the child and dress him/her in good clothing. Thereafter the father should hold the child and sit on the 'yajna vedi' facing the east and everyone present should bless the child with a life of one hundred years and that the child may continue to grow physically, mentally and spiritually in the years ahead.

## **9. Karna-Vedha (कर्णवेध) Sanskar (EAR –PIERCING SACRAMENT)**

Karṇavedha or **Karnavedham**, ear-piercing Sacrament, sanskar is the ninth sacrament and it involves the piercing of both the ear lobes and is done on any joyous day between third and fifth year of child's birth. This sacrament is for both boys and girls. There are two reasons for piercing the ears. Firstly, it is to protect the child from diseases, and secondly, to place ornament in the ears.

### **The Procedure for Ear-Piercing Sacrament**

On the morning of the day set aside for this sacrament, the child should be bathed and dressed and brought by the mother to the place where yajna is to be performed. The parents should perform Vishesh Yajna. After the yajna, place some items of food and dolls etc. in front of the child to distract the child and then perform the ear-piercing.

The person performing the ear-piercing should pull the ear lobe with his left hand and pierce the ear slowly in the spot - 'Devkrit Chidra' - where the sun rays shine through. This spot is called 'Devakrit Chidra' because the thin spot where sun rays shine through has been provided by 'Dev' (God) since birth. The piercing should be done only by a person who knows about the nerves of the ears.

The piercing is performed by reciting the two mantras (verses) given in Sanskar Vidhi. The right ear is pierced after reciting the first mantra and the left with the second mantra. Thereafter the person piercing the ears should insert a small wooden piece into the hole so that it does not close up. If desired, an ornament made of gold may be inserted. Suitable medicine should be applied to avoid pus being formed, and promote early healing.

## 10. Upanayanam (उपनयनम्) Sanskar

(SACRAMENT FOR WEARING YAJNOPAVEET)

उपनयनम्, *upanayanam* or यज्ञोपवीतम्, *yajñopavitam* sanskaar. 'Yajnopaveet' or the sacred thread is one of the main signs of Vedic culture. Today, we have forgotten about this extremely holy sign. The sacred thread is known by many names (varying by region and community), such as **Poita, Janeu, Lagun, Yajnopavita, Yagyopavit, Yonya** and **Zunnar**. Yajnopaveet means the taking on your shoulders the sacred thread for Yajna, for becoming an authority on the learning/ teachings of the Vedas. It is also called 'Brahm-Sutra'. The meaning of 'Brahm' is Ved, knowledge and God. This thread is worn for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and reaching God.

This sacrament is the tenth sacrament. It is performed so that after this the child will commence the study of Vedas and other appropriate texts. The meaning of study of Vedas in this day and age is the commencement of the education of the child. This sacrament is the doorway to the temple of education. The entry through this doorway and the learning process is called 'Vedarambh Sanskar'.

### The significance of Yajnopaveet

There are three threads in the Yajnopaveet which are the signifiers of three debts i.e., as soon as a person is born there are three debts that fall on his/her shoulders- the fulfillment of which become his/her duty. These debts are indebtedness to a) the seers or 'rishis' b) parents and c) 'Devas' or other persons who have done good to us.

**a) Debt to seers-** The seers have made us knowledgeable by acquiring knowledge and passing it on to the society. If they did not have such knowledge then we would be completely deprived of it. Just as they have acquired knowledge and passed it on to us, so should we acquire knowledge and arrange that it flows on to others in the future. One of the three threads of Yajnopaveet reminds us of this obligation.

**b) Debt to parents-** Our parents completed their 'brahmacharya ashram' (celibacy) and entered into stage of married life and gave birth to us. If they had not entered the stage of married life, then how would we have been born? In the same way, after completing the celibacy stage we enter into the stage of married life and produce good children for the society so that the society continues from father to son, son to grandson etc. When we complete the celibacy stage and enter into married life, then we appreciate all the good done to us by our parents. When we experience the amount of sacrifice that is involved in looking after our children and the number of obstacles that have to be overcome, then we realize that our parents would have also sacrificed so much for us. This reminds us that we should serve our parents and become free from this indebtedness. The second thread of Yajnopaveet draws our attention to this.

**c) Debt to 'Devas' or noble people -** We are so engrossed in the affairs of the world that their attraction ties us down. In the end all such affection /attraction will not remain. Therefore when one is relieved from the stage of married life ('grihasth ashram') i.e., after educating and having sons and daughters married off, the couple should enter the next stage of life - 'vanprasth ashram' (life of learning and service to society) for the good of society. The third

thread of Yajnopaveet reminds us of this obligation and the good done to society by noble people.

Upnayan sacrament is called 'up nayan' because 'up' means near and 'nayan' means to take. In ancient times when parents took their children for admission to Gurukuls (schools), they used to take them to the teacher at Gurukul who used to perform the child's 'upnayan' sacrament first. What is understood by going to school in current times, in ancient days the same meaning was attached to 'upnayan'. The teacher used to start the child's education by giving a special place to the child in his mind. The three threads of Yajnopaveet also direct attention to these three qualities namely- knowledge, strength and good conduct.

The living habits, speech and eating habits etc of the person wearing Yajnopaveet should be pure. In particular the person must not consume meat and liquor.

#### **The mantra for wearing Yajnopaveet**

**Om Yajnopaveetam paramam pavitram prajapateyatsahajam purastat.**

**Ayushyamagrayam pratimunch shubhra Yajnopaveetam balamastu tejah.**

**Yajnopaveetamasi yajyasya twa yajnopaveete-nopanhyami.** Paraskar Grihasutra 2,2,11.

Meaning - This 'Yajnopaveet' or 'Brahma Sutra' is very pure. I am wearing this in front of the learned teacher. I wear this Yajnopaveet which gives a long life, is the promoter of spiritual progress and is a sign of purity. I wear this pure 'Brahma Sutra' for receiving knowledge.

Reciting this mantra the teacher should place the Yajnopaveet on the left shoulder near the neck, and take it over the head placing it under the right hand and ending at the waist.

Thereafter the yajna prescribed for this sacrament in the Sanskar Vidhi should be performed.

## **11. Vedā'rambha (वेदारम्भ) Sanskar (BEGINNING OF STUDY)**

Vidyā'rambham (*Vidya* means "knowledge", *arambham* means "beginning") This sacrament is the eleventh sacrament out of the sixteen sacraments. The word "Vedārambha" is made of two words, 'Ved' and 'Arambh'. 'Ved' means knowledge and 'Arambh' means to begin i.e. to begin studies. Boys and girls now go to school to receive education. In Vedic philosophy the education of a child has such an important place that there are sixteen sacraments formulated to uplift his or her life. The Vedic seers state that the following three factors have an effect on the child and it is the responsibility of the education system to take care of them:-

- (1) Effects of the last lives.
- (2) Qualities acquired from parents.
- (3) The effects of the environment in the present life.

The education of a child can be said to be continuity of the sacraments. For the future development of a child the Vedic philosophers have given consideration to the following five factors:-

- (1) Environment
- (2) Student (celibate)
- (3) Preceptor (teacher)
- (4) Subject of study
- (5) Achieving the goals of life.

### **(1) Child's Study Environment**

The Vedas state that those who are in-charge of educational institutions should ensure that educational institutions are maintained very pure, environmental cleanliness and personal conduct of students/teachers; only then it is possible to develop the minds of the students in the pure form. Today educational institutions are built in polluted town and city areas, where instead of producing noble human beings, large sums of money are spent on constructing buildings only, for higher education and human integrity is on the decline.

Accepting the student for the purpose of education, the teacher takes such a good care of him or her as a mother takes care of the child in her womb. Can there be any other better example than this regarding student-teacher relationship? The child stays in the mother's womb. The mother breathes, not the fetus, mother eats the food, not the fetus, mother drinks water, not the fetus. The child's breath is through the mother's breath, the child's food is through the mother's food and the child's fluid is through the mother's fluid. Can there be any other example better than mother and fetus relationship regarding the teacher and the student?

## **(2) The Student /Celibate**

Students entering the educational institutions should follow three rules.

**(a)** The student should work hard continuously, in which there is no room for laziness, has to be alert at all times, in which there is only devotion and effort. In Vedic terms it is called 'Tapasya' meaning a life of hardship and sacrifice. The student should be told to spend a life of regular hard work, never to be idle, to sleep during night, day time is not for sleeping but for working, never to loose temper, never to tell a lie and to spend a life of hardship and sacrifice.

**(b)** The teacher gives an undertaking and assures the student that he accepts him/her within his own heart. The teacher and the student try to come so close to each other, that their minds become one.

Such a heavy responsibility is laid upon the shoulders of a teacher. The teacher gives an assurance to the student that he/she is taking the responsibility of him/her in his/her own hands and will direct the heart and the mind of the student in the right direction in the coming future.

Initially the child takes birth from the mother and the father, which is the birth of a physical body. Second birth takes place when the child enters the school, accepts the teacher as the mother and the father and learns from the teacher. This is the birth of the mind. In other words after gaining knowledge the child has the second birth.

**(c)** Oath of celibacy – the word celibacy means a student with a high desire in the mind and heart of becoming great. Celibacy also means not wasting semen, maintaining pure character and spending a good moral life. This is the second aim of the Vedic education.

## **(3) Preceptor (the teacher)**

In Vedic philosophy the educator or teacher is called the preceptor. In this philosophy while the student is called celibate, the teacher is called a preceptor (Acharya). The word 'Acharya' means one who is of righteous conduct and transforms the life of the students in the similar manner. In Vedas the student and the teacher are two focal points in education. Righteous conduct is the line that connects the two. If one does not have good character then one is not a teacher, similarly without good character one is not a student and education is not proper. What use is there for education in which only fees is collected from students for the sake of passing exams and nothing is done about character building. Such educational institutions are not educational institutions but profit making business ventures. Today educational institutions have become business centers. Character building is not even regarded as part of education. A new philosophy has taken birth which states that, private life is separate matter from public life.

The teacher also claims that no one has the right to interfere with his / her private life at home, be it gambling, drinking liquor or doing anything, since it is his / her private life. If the character of the teacher is such then why would not the student's character be the same? If a teacher himself / herself is like burnt out firewood, has no heat in it, behaves differently in public and in private lives, then how can he or she enlighten a student. A diya (clay lamp) that is already lit up can light an unlit diya.

“Character is not so much taught as caught.” The problems caused in the educational world today by students are not that severe compared to the problems caused by the teachers.

### **The Subject of Study**

The aim of the Vedic education system is not confined to the study of academic books alone, but together with this the aim is to present the spiritual viewpoint, concerning the soul and God. In life, there is not only our physical body and material world, within this body there is a soul. Behind the material world there is spiritual world. The Yajurveda states that due to the influence of worldly pleasures, the spiritual truth is disappearing from our sight. After lifting this curtain one is able to see the spiritual side of which we are unaware. True knowledge is one in which there is the blending of both material and spiritual education. Only after knowing both spiritual and material sciences one is able to see the whole spectrum of life. Life is incomplete by the knowledge of one only. There is a place for both, in respective areas, in life.

### **(4) Attaining the Goal of life**

After completing the studies at the educational institution and when returning home, the teacher advises the student that whatever he/she has learnt while in the teacher’s company, it is expected that you will follow a life of truth and religion, will take care of your parents and will pay due respect to the elders. Today it is repeatedly emphasized to the youngsters that the aim of education is to become capable of earning a living. Becoming a bread and butter earner is good, but the main aim of education is to produce good human beings. During the 14-16 years of study we do not tell students what is life, what is truth, what is righteous, and what is the objective of life. The words of the teacher should be that you will definitely earn bread and butter, will fill your stomach but do remember, whatever you do, remain a good moral human being, in other words never ever forget whatever you learnt about qualities of humanity.

## **12. Samā’vartana (समावर्तन) Sanskar (COMPLETION OF STUDY)**

Samā’vartana, also known as **Snāna**, is the twelfth sacrament out of the sixteen sacraments. Samaavartan, as it is usually called, means completion of study and return home of the student. The objective of this sacrament is the advice that is given by the preceptor (teacher) to the student on completion of study, as to how he/she must behave in daily life in this world. It is an indication that the student was ignorant of the worldly knowledge until now. Therefore knowledge is given to him/her in accordance with the religious books as follows:-

Always maintain partnership in all dealings of noble souls. This means that on entering the stage of married life, it is necessary to be very cautious. Keep company of or act in agreement with the advice given by noble male/female souls, so that he/she continues to receive wealth etc and achieves objectives and keeps away from wicked men and women. Because of inexperience, young men and women of today get caught in the net of sinful souls and end up causing harm to themselves. This is the reason why the marriage of so many young men and women ends up in divorce. Learned people working together are successful in doing good work, but is it not the case that so many companies, factories, shops, as well as families and brothers break up because all those working together are not noble souls? Only those persons who love one another and maintain good behavior can work together. Therefore, a newly married person can only be successful by working together with those persons who have good qualities.

An unmarried young person has to enter into the stage of married life. Therefore the preceptor gives the student important and noble advice that without wealth, good reputation, knowledge, intellect, and good moral conduct, you will never be able to achieve your

objective and the only way to receive them is to make good use of them. Their misuse makes them like poison and harmful, whereas with proper usage they prove to be nectar-like. This statement looks simple when stated, but is difficult to follow in married life where the senses have to be put to use in special circumstances. Mind tempting pleasures that give joy to the senses make the married person, who has acquired wealth and wife, transcend the limits and entangle in disease and suffering. The preceptor gives all these knowledge to the students during samaavartan sacrament.

The student from his/her side, states – listen good people! This respected preceptor has done a great service to me, has removed my ignorance and made me a good learned person. In return I sincerely thank and pay respect to my preceptor and pray that just as you have made me happy through the best knowledge, in the same way I will continue to make other students happy and will never forget the good that you have done to me.

Almighty God, with your kind oversight, make me and others who study and teach, as well as the whole world- well behaved, knowledgeable and powerful in body and soul. May we, with long life, good health, hard work and initiative, do service to others and perform good deeds. May we assimilate the qualities, deeds and nature of God into our lives and thus achieve righteousness, wealth, desires and salvation and always remain in happiness and peace. NB In order to perform Samaavartan sacrament, see 'Sanskrit Vidhi' where the method of performing this sacrament is given together with the mantras.

### **13. Vivāha (विवाह) Sanskar (MARRIAGE SACRAMENT)**

**Vivāha** (Sanskrit) or **Vivaah** (Hindi) (विवाह): is a word for marriage. This sacrament is the thirteenth sacrament out of sixteen sacraments. Marriage sacrament is also known as entry into the stage of married family life. The stage of being in married family life is regarded as the biggest and noblest of all stages of life. This stage of life commences with marriage. What is marriage? Vedic marriage is a high standard of religious bond. The word 'vivah' is made up of two words- 'vi'- 'vah' = 'vishesh'. 'Vi' means 'vishesh' or 'special' and 'vah' means 'vahan' or 'vehicle', chariot, motor car etc. Marriage is such a vehicle in which the husband and wife are like two wheels, in which both have to be of one type. In other words, it can be also said that when two human beings – male and female, become attracted to one another in love and promise to help one another with heart, soul and body, it is called marriage. It should not be based on just physical appearances, material possessions, emotions, etc., - it is a life-long commitment.

Marriage also has another meaning i.e., to fulfill the responsibilities of married family life in a special way. There are several variations in how the ceremony is conducted, based on local customs. Therefore, it is important for the Pandit to meet with both parties to educate them – that they understand and are ready to be married; and get their input or any local customs they would like to include in the ceremony, provided same is/are not anti-Vedic.

#### **Examination of Bride and Bridegroom**

Before marriage takes place, the marriage partners should be examined. This means that an examination of the good and bad characteristics of males and females should be conducted by those qualified to do so, and marriage should only be conducted between males and females who have good characteristics. A male doctor should conduct an examination of any hidden diseases in the male and in like manner, a female doctor should examine the female for such diseases. Their state of mental health should also be checked by a learned male and a learned female. The age, family background, permanent place of residence, body and nature of the bride and bridegroom must also be examined. In other words, both should know

about one another i.e., their qualities, deeds and nature should be similar and both should be desirous of getting married. The age of the female should be two to four years less than the age of the male. Both parties should investigate the family backgrounds of each other. Marriage should never take place between close relatives.

### **Merits of Close and Distant Marriages:**

- 1) It is not possible to develop true love between those males and females who have lived together from childhood, played together, fought and loved one another, know the good and bad qualities of one another and have seen one another naked.
- 2) Just as mixing water with water does not change the quality of the water, in the same way marrying someone in one's own family does not produce children of good breed.
- 3) Just as mixing sugar candy or ginger in milk makes it good, in the same way marriage of males and females away from their families is good.
- 4) Just as a sick person regains his health by moving to another country which involves change in the environment and food, in the same way distant marriages are the best.
- 5) There is likely to be disputes between families of close marriages because there will be regular visits between family members. This does not happen in distant marriages, furthermore, the love between the distant families increases, whereas this does not happen in close marriages.
- 5) If the parents of the bride are poor and the marriage has taken place at a close distance, then she will visit her parents regularly and when returning, the parents will have to give her something each time. In this way the parents will become even poorer. This problem does not occur in distant marriages.

Sacraments have great importance in the Vedic religion. To enable human life to be of a high standard, divine, great and highly cultured, Maharishi Dayanand has set out the sixteen sacraments in 'Sanskrit Vidhi'. All sacraments are important; however, marriage sacrament is most important of all. In reality, this is the sacrament which is the foundation of all other sacraments.

At the present time human beings give very little attention to sacraments. Today, only two or three sacraments are being practiced in place of the sixteen sacraments and even those are not being done in accordance with the proper procedure. The families of the bridegroom and bride consider feeding everyone to be the main event and as far as the sacrament is concerned, it is their wish that it be completed within the minimum of time.

### **Marriage at youthful stage**

A male enters into the stage of youth at 25 years of age, while a female enters this stage at 18-20 years of age. There are many benefits of marriage at this stage of life.

(1) Marriage at this stage takes place after fully understanding one's responsibilities. The benefit of marriage when the male is 25 years or over and female is 18-20 years is that such marriage takes place after proper investigations, is done with the consent of the male and the female, hence the responsibility falls on the husband and the wife, and not on the parents. They cannot blame anyone else if they do not get along together in future.

(2) State of physical and mental maturity - at this stage the male and female have fully grown up physically, therefore marriage at this age does not interfere with the physical development of the body. Children born from such mature human beings are healthy. It is only right that immature body produces immature children and mature body produces mature children. Like physical maturity, there is mental maturity at this age which is necessary for having a good family life.

## Religious Procedure

Vedic marriage is a religious sacrament, not a task; that is why there are several procedures undertaken in it, in the form of sacrament, so that righteousness becomes firmly established. For example, verses from the Vedas are recited, marriage is performed in front of the sacrificial fire, seven steps and other procedures are undertaken and close relatives are invited and marriage is performed in their presence.

The religious sacrament that is performed in Vedic marriages is outlined below.

### Position of wife in marriage

Maharishi Dayanand has accepted the position of the wife in marriage to be always on the right hand side of the husband. After performance of 'Lajahom' procedure, wherein oblations of roasted paddy are given, Rishi Dayanand writes –

*'After this, the bride should sit on the right hand side of the bridegroom and seated west of the Hawan Kund and facing the east, the bridegroom, after reciting 'Om Prajapataye swaha'.... should give one oblation of ghee into the Hawan Kund'.*

After completion of the marriage ceremony and when bride and bridegroom are leaving, Rishi Dayanand writes - *'and while sitting in the vehicle the bride groom should have the bride seated on his right hand side.'*

Not only this, Dayanand has further stated that when performing the Yajna on reaching home after marriage, the wife shall be seated on the right hand side of the husband - *'The bride shall be seated on the right hand side of the bridegroom, west of the Hawan Kund and facing the sun'.*

### Vedic Marriage- a critical examination

Married life is the most important and noble of all stages of life. This stage of life commences with marriage. In Vedic religion great emphasis is placed on ensuring that the qualities, deeds and nature of the bride and bridegroom are similar. A Western doctor- Dr. Magnus Hirsh Field has also written beautifully on this subject- 'Happy marriages are not made in heaven but in the laboratory'. Both the man and woman should be carefully examined not only with regard to their fitness to marry but whether they are fit to marry each other.

## Marriage Sacrament

Marriage sacrament means entering into the stage of married life. According to our religious books, marriage sacrament is very pure and important sacrament. The Vedic procedure for marriage sacrament is as follows -

### 1) Welcoming of the bridegroom

When the bridegroom enters the 'mandap' (place where marriage is to be conducted) at the bride's residence on the day of the marriage ceremony, the bride first of all says 'I welcome you' and garlands the bridegroom. After the garlanding, the bride requests the bridegroom to take a seat and gives 'madhupark' (curd, honey and ghee mixed together) for him to eat.

In fact this is the method of serving the husband who returns home after the day's hard work. Whenever the husband comes home, the wife should welcome him and look after him with a smile. Irrespective of the number of servants in the household, the husband should be looked after by the wife herself. Other visitors to the house should be similarly greeted and served.

### (2) Madhupark

Madhupark is a mixture of curd, honey and ghee. The proportion in which these are mixed is as follows- curd three parts, honey two parts and ghee one part. After mixing these, it should be kept in a glass container. This is a tonic and of great medicinal value. The qualities of the three food items is as follows-

Curd - increases heat, digestion, smoothness, energy and semen and destroys gas.



Honey - is cool, sweet, delicious, conducive to appetite, destroys abscess and removes phlegm.

Ghee - brings about extreme beauty, brightness, increases intelligence and destroys poison and bile.

The performance of 'madhupark' signifies as to the type of food that the wife should cook in the home. Food should have qualities derived from yoghurt, honey and ghee. Accordingly food should be such as to:-

1. Keep the level of gas, bile and phlegm in the body even. If these three are not kept even the body becomes unhealthy.

2. Promote long life and strength. Food should be attractive and delicious like honey.

There is another special quality in honey. Other things in this world are prepared after destroying some thing first; for example when sugar is made, sugar cane is destroyed. However the process whereby honey is made is such that flowers etc from which nectar is collected by bees to make honey are not destroyed. In the same way earnings through occupation in married life should be such that one does not rule over others or destroy others.

The bridegroom holds the madhupark and says as follows:-

***Om mitrasya tva chakshusha pratikshe.*** Paraskar 1/3/16

O God! I am looking at this madhupark with a friendly eye.

Whenever food comes our way, we should always look at it with a friendly eye. The best of foods eaten without feeling happy or showing interest in it does not nourish the body. Food eaten with interest is not only tasty but is also very nourishing to the body.

Holding the madhupark in his left hand the bridegroom says:- O Almighty God! May the air, the river and medicinal herbs be honey-like. May the night and the morning, earth and the space above us be beneficial to us. May the forests be honey-like. May the sun shine for our happiness and may the cows and other animals produce a lot of milk.

With the above feelings the bridegroom sprinkles the madhupark to the east, south, west, north, and in the upward direction. Sprinkling the madhupark, the bridegroom is expressing his feeling that may there always be plentiful of good things like madhupark everywhere; may everyone have food of this type to eat so that every citizen may be healthy, strong and happy.

### **(3) Godaan (donating cow)**

After madhupark, the next step in the marriage ceremony is Godaan or donating a cow. Cow is a symbol of Vedic culture. As the saying goes - if there is no cow there is no home. The reason for giving a cow to the newly wed is that milk and other milk products are necessary for the good health of all members of the family. Ancient seers have created an excellent system for the protection of cows by requiring donation of a cow at the time of marriage. These days instead of donating a cow, money and other items are donated.

### **(4) Kanya Samarpan (handing over of the bride)**

After donating a cow or money etc., the bride's father hands over his daughter to the bridegroom by placing his daughter's right hand onto the bridegroom's right hand. This is what is known as handing over the bride. On this occasion whatever sovereign etc. that the father gives to the daughter is regarded as her possession. At some time or another when she faces difficulty in her life, this possession can prove to be very helpful. In this way the father gives to his daughter a part of his wealth which is not available to her in any other way.

### **(5) Pratijya Mantra (Promises)**

The bridegroom and bride both say the following mantra :-

***Om samanjantu vishwe deva samapo hridayani nau.***

***Sam matarishwa sam dhata samudeshtri dadhatu nau.*** Rig 10.85.47

Meaning - O learned persons present in this yajshala! (place where marriage is performed). We are entering into married life through our own free will and happiness. May our hearts become one, like water. Just as air is precious to all, in the same way we will be precious for one another. Just as God is the support of all, in the same way may we be the support of one another. The main essence of marriage is the meeting of two hearts. May our hearts meet in such way as do waters from two wells.

In this world when two things meet and become one, they can be separated. For example if sugar gets mixed with sand, ants can separate it. If milk is mixed with water then a swan can separate it. But there is no animal or bird nor has any scientist invented any instrument which can separate water from two separate wells that has been mixed together. Just as two hearts leave their individual identities and become one, in the same way, may our hearts also become one. The bride and bridegroom should not even think of any other male or female as their partners, apart from one another.

#### **(6) Main Duties of the Wife**

After marriage the bride will go with the bridegroom to his house. How should she behave in her new home - the bridegroom voices his feelings on this as follows:-

***Om bhurbhuvah swah.***

***Aghorachakshurpatighnyedhi shiva pashubhyah sumanah suvarchah .***

***Virsurdevrikama syona bhav dwipade sham chatushpade.*** Rig 10.85.44

Meaning - O beautiful wife who does not rebel against the husband! With the blessing of Almighty God and with your own effort may you show respect and love to everyone. May you be auspicious to the animals. With a pure heart, be smiling like the beautiful flowers. May you shine with knowledge and good qualities. Give birth to brave sons and daughters. Treat my younger brothers with love and affection. In short, treat all human beings and animals in the house in such a way that everyone is happy.

The wife replies as follows-

***Om pra me patiyana panthah kalpatam***

***shiva arishta patilok gameyam.*** Gobhil Grihasutra.2.1.20

Meaning - My path is the same as my husband's path (of righteousness). I will follow whatever instructions (righteous) that you will give me so that I may be happy and achieve moksha (salvation) without difficulty.

#### **(7) Agnihotra (Yaj)**

Followers of Vedic faith use fire as the symbol of witness in all their religious duties. Therefore before commencing the main part of the marriage ceremony, normal yaj is performed first. This is also the time when the Vedic Purohit (priest) who will officiate the marriage ceremony is accorded acceptance.

#### **(8) Five Special Oblations**

After normal yaj has been performed, five special oblations are offered. While offering these five oblations the bride places her right hand on the right shoulder of the bridegroom. These five oblations draw the attention of the couple to the five duties that need to be performed in the home daily. These five duties should be performed daily in every family, in so far as practicable. By placing her right hand on the husband's shoulder the wife is signifying that she will continue to perform these duties during his absence, however the husband will have to meet the cost that will be incurred in this.

#### **(9) Rashtrabhrith Homa (Prayer for the nation)**

A number of responsibilities fall upon the newly married couple as soon as they enter the stage of married life. It is the duty of every married couple to look after the nation, to make the nation determined and powerful. We must make our nation prosperous in every way, therefore they offer special oblations for the nation. In these mantras (verses) it is requested

of the couple that they protect mental and physical strength in the society. “Brahm Shakti” refers to power of the brain, or the power of mental and spiritual knowledge. ‘Kshatra Shakti’ refers to the power of the body or the physical power. The society maintains its strength with these two powers.

*JAYA HOM (Prayer for victory)*

In this prayer, oblations are offered with the aim of being successful in life.

ABHYATAN HOM (Prayer for prosperity) ‘Abhyatan’ means personal progress in every way—that is the development of the body, mind and soul. The prayer in Abhyatan mantras is—**“So ma awatu asmin brahmni, asmin chatre”** - may God be my protector in the development of my mental and physical strength.

There is beauty in this sequence. Firstly there is collective prayer in this and then there is personal prayer. It is clear from this sequence that the nation is more important than the individual. Where national importance is considered paramount there is the emergence of the national spirit and the nation prospers. In contrast to this where an individual is given all powers and responsibilities, national independence is destroyed. If the citizens of the country are healthy and strong then the country will also be powerful. Therefore the development of the individual is most important for the development of the nation. Someone has put it well “if every individual improves himself/herself, then the improvement of the nation is very simple. If a person is only thinking of the national progress, and does not pay attention to his own progress then what is the consequence of this? Such people do not make progress and are left behind.

On the other hand if a person only thinks of his/her own progress, and closes his/her eyes to the national welfare, then there is bad behavior, corruption, dishonest practices, theft, hoarding and other evils through selfishness. The question arises as to what is the noble path? The answer is that the middle path is the noble path. The person who keeps in mind both the national progress as well as the individual progress, is the person who is victorious in this world. This is why Jaya Hom is placed in between the two yajs.

#### **(10) Oblations Offered in Respect of Children**

After Jaya Hom, eight oblations of ghee are offered. The main prayer in these mantras is as follows:- (1) May the wife give birth to good children. (2) May the wife not suffer children related problems. (3) May she never suffer from lack of children. (4) May her children live for long, so that she may enjoy their company. (5) Through God’s grace, may peace prevail in her house and that there be no unhappiness at night.

#### **(11) Holding the Bride’s Hand – Duty of the Husband**

From here the main part of the marriage ceremony begins. Holding the right hand of the bride, the husband recites six mantras. The essence of these mantras is as follows:-

***Aum gribhnani te saubhagatwaya hastam maya patya jaradashtiryathasah.***

***Bhago aryama savita purandhirmahyam twadurgarhpatyaya devah.*** (Rigveda 10/85/36)

O beautiful bride! I take your hand for fame and noble children and other fortune. May you live with me happily until old age.

In the same way the bride says:- O brave husband! I am also accepting your hand for good fortune. May you live with me happily and contended until old age. God who is the giver of peace and happiness, just, the creator of the universe and its supporter and those learned persons present in this ceremony have handed me over to you for the sustenance of married life. We are for on another from today.

***Bhagaste hastamgrabhit savita hastamgrabhit.***

***Patni twamasi dharmanaham grahpatistava.*** (Atharva Ved 14/1/51)

O bride! Full of fame and able to procreate, and follower of the path of righteousness, I take your hand. You are my wife through dharm, similarly I am your husband. Let us together fulfill the duties of the house and married life.

***Mameyamastu poshya mahyam twadad brihaspatih.***

***Maya patya prajawati sam jiva sharadah shatam.*** Atharva ved 14/1/52

O bride! God who is the sustainer of the whole universe has given you to me. I will never forget my duty that I have to earn wealth through just means and provide for your living. O bride! Live with me happily for a hundred years.

***Twashta waso vyadadhachubhe kam brihaspateh prashisha kavinam.***

***Tenemam narim savita bhagashcha surryamiwa pari dhattam prajaya.***

Atharvaved 14/2/53

O bride! Together with food items I will also provide you with clothing and ornaments which have been prepared by noble skilled persons. May God who is full of fame and the creator of the whole universe bless you shining like the sun's rays, with children.

***Indragni dyawaprithivi matarishwa mitravaruna bhago ashwinobha.***

***Brihaspatirmaruto brahm som narim prajaya wardhayantu.*** (Atharvaved 14/1/55)

O my relatives! Just as electricity and fire, sun and earth, air, breathe, peace giving materials, good doctors and true preachers, king, learned persons, subjects, God, knowledge of Vedas, medicinal herbs enhance this lady with children, in the same way please also increase her happiness with good wishes and blessings. I will also continue to enhance her with children etc.

***Aham vishyami mayi rupamasya vedaditpashyanmanasah kulayam.***

***Na steyamadmi manasodmuchye swayam shrathnano varunasya pashan.***

(Atharvaved 14/1/57)

O bride! I see the enhancement of my progeny and look at you with love and come to you with affection. In the same way please come to me also. I will never consume anything by hiding it from you and will never let such thought enter my mind. With all my strength and good behavior, I will remove evil hearted persons from you

After reciting these six mantras the bridegroom helps the bride to stand up. Thereafter both walk around the sacrificial fire once and stand at their original places of sitting.

The bride groom recites the following mantra:-

***Om amo hamasmi sa twam sa twamasyamoham.***

***Samahamasmi riktam dyohraham prithivi twam.***

***Taveva vivahavahai putran vindavahai sah reto dadhavahai.***

***Prajam prajanayavahai bahun.***

***Te santu jaradastayah sam priyoh rochishnu sumanasyamanau.***

***Pashyema sharadah shatam jivema sharadah shatam, shrinuyama sharadah shatam.***

(Paraskar 1.6.3.)

O Dear! I am like the musical Samved and you are poetess like Rigved. I am like the sun which promotes rain and you are conceiver like the earth. Come let us marry with pleasure and conceive and produce noble children. May those children have long life. May we love each other, be in the best of health, always be happy and see each other with love for a hundred years, live in bliss for a hundred years and listen to each others' pleasant speech for a hundred years.

**(12) Shila Arohan**

***Om arohma mashman mashmeva twam sthira bhawa.***

***Abhitishta pritanayato – vabadhaswa pritanayatah.*** ( Paraskar 1.7.1.)

O Lady! You must become firm as a rock, in religious activities. If you ever come across difficulties, in family life then be firm and steady like the rock which stays steady during heavy

rainfall and hurricane. You must defend yourself firmly from those who may attack you. For this make your body as strong as steel.

### **(13) Laja Hom (Oblations of roasted paddy)**

Offering oblations of roasted paddy is a very important procedure in the marriage ceremony. In this procedure the bride's brother fills the palms of his sister (the bride) with the roasted paddy. After reciting the mantras, she drops it into the sacrificial fire. The groom helps her in this performance – meaning both of them should do all religious ceremonies together. The meanings of the mantras the bride recites are as follows;-

1. O Just God! You are separating me from my parents but I must stay firm in my husband's family and never ever separate from there.
2. In offering these roasted paddies, my wish is that my husband may live long and the members of my family (the in-laws) prosper with wealth and health.
3. O husband! I am offering this paddy for your success. May God bless forever, the love between you and me.

After completing the paddy oblation ceremony, the bridegroom holds the phalanges of the bride and recites the mantras which express the women's dignity.

### ***Tamadya gatham gasyami ya strinam uttamam yashah.***

O Lady! I will sing the praises and good deeds of the ladies to you from this day.

This was the procedure, now let us focus on the ideological meaning of the procedure. The brother while filling the palms of his sister (the bride) is promising to her as follows: O Sister! You are departing from your parent's home. The father's responsibility finishes today and my responsibility begins. Whenever you will come here, I will fill your palms with noble and generous earnings of mine, on your departure from here.

While offering the paddy, the true meaning of marriage is explained to the bride and the groom. The roasted paddy is made from paddy. The paddy comprises of husk and rice. The husk represents the bride and the rice represents the groom. As long they keep together they are protected. As long as the husk sticks with the rice, its value is high, but if it separates, it loses its value. In the same way as long as the bride is in the company of the groom, she is very adorable and respectable. On the other hand, the rice becomes more valuable when separated from its husk, but loses its germinating values. On planting the rice no cultivator can fulfill his ambitions. No matter how valuable the polished rice may be, to germinate it has to take the assistance of its husk. Similarly a man who wants children must respect his wife.

The paddy is sown in seed bed first to produce seedlings. Later these seedlings are uprooted and transplanted at a different place, then only does it grow, flower and fruit. Similarly a girl is born and bred at the parent's home, but only produces children when she goes to her husband's home.

### **(14) Saptpati (seven steps, seven vows)**

This is the last main procedure in the marriage ceremony. At this stage the bride's clothes are tied in a knot to the groom's clothes. The significance behind tying the knot is that a man or a woman is unable to take the seven steps alone. Both of them, together, can assist each other to live a steady family life in this world, which can be likened a huge river.

What is the other reason for tying the knot?

Sitting in the marriage ceremonial stage and tying the knots does not only represent the fact of clothes being tied together. More importantly it represents the tying together of two hearts. In the Vedic religion there is no divorce. Thus the groom and the bride have become one and their relationship has become one. Tying of the knot is done to signify this.

While taking the steps, the groom is reminding the bride,

***“Ma savyen dakhshin matikram”.***

O bride! Never take a wrong step in place of the right step.

While fulfilling family duties never let deceptive means take the place of simplicity, truth and justice to be over powered by untruth and injustice. Do not ever follow wrong directions under any circumstance. Always give preference only to truth and not untruth. With these words the groom requests the bride to walk forward beginning with the right foot. To begin walking with the right foot means you should follow simple, correct path and never the wrong path.

#### **14. Vānaprastha (वानप्रस्थ) Sanskar (Retirement Stage)**

Now-a-days people are so tied down to family life that they have no wish to be freed from it. They find it very painful to leave the family life. People spend their entire life in this state. Seers have regarded 'ashram' as a camp or a halting place. They regarded life as a journey which they divided into four stages, the first being 'Brahmacharya'. The second stage is married life or family life. The third stage is one where the couple left the family after retiring, to stay in huts built in the forest. Most people today have overlooked the four stages of life. As a result they are tied down to family life and have no intention of moving out of it. They are so attached to it as if to say that they will live forever. They completely forget that they have to leave family life and move on to the next stage. In any event it is a known fact that one has to leave family life one day or another. However, family life is such a maze that like Abhimanyu, a person is able to get into it but does not know how to get out of it. People continue to worry about the worldly affairs until their last breath.

Seers have said that at the age of 50, i.e., when grandchildren are born, married people should hand over the family duties to their sons and move on to the next stage of their life's journey. However, these days, people do not follow this path. One of the rules of an inn or place of temporary residence is that one cannot stay therein for more than 5-7 days. If some one overstays, then the inn keeper firstly tries to inform the person of this by sign language. However if after receiving the right signal the person does not move out, then the inn keeper tells the person directly to move out. If after this the person still does not move out, then the person's articles / possessions are thrown out.

Those who have reached the stage of leaving family life and moving on to the next stage should see within themselves if the attitude towards them in the house is like that of the lodge keeper. Some daughters-in-law curse them saying, the old fellow neither lives nor dies and has turned the whole house into an unbearable place to live in. Why do the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law fight? It is because the mother-in-law wants to live in the house as if she herself is the daughter-in-law. In old age the father also seems to be a burden on the sons because he wants to control the sons till his last breath.

In most families there is quarrelling. Quarrels between the father and son and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are very common. The seers had solved this problem by establishing Vanprasth Ashram. They had said that since in the end we have to leave this world any way, it is better to leave it on your own free will rather than being pushed out.

There is accumulation of materials as well as its sacrifice in this world. Both of these are appropriate in their respective time periods. However, after satisfying one's needs from the worldly materials, one must think of leaving them as well. It is necessary for the society of today to have the spirit of Vanprasth Ashram. Instead of being attached to worldly materials, it is necessary to have the urge to sacrifice.

Today we are deeply attached to minor things. We know that we are on the path of untruth, yet we do not change our attitude. Later on this attitude becomes a matter of pride for us. When we are appointed to "position", we get so attached to it that we do not want to leave it. Many feel that the "position" has become a part of their body and find it hard to leave it.

There is only one way out of this problem and that is to awaken the spirit of Vanprasth Ashram in the people. Vanprasth does not only mean going away into the forest; Vanprasth also means sacrifice and giving up the urge to accumulate wealth. The word 'parigrah' means to accumulate materials from all sides and 'aparigrah' means to leave all these materials at the right time. Does not the fruit on ripening leave the tree by itself? Similarly a person should retire from family attachments at the appropriate time and move on to Vanprasth Ashram.

What is the purpose of Vanprasth ashram, knowing well that one has to leave this world one day?. When we have to leave this world anyway, then where is the sense in moving after being pushed out by someone' rather than taking your own initiative to move on. Vanprasth Ashram is not meant for leaving the worldly things, in a state of helplessness, but rather leaving them on one's free will. It is not meant for running away from this world in fear, but rather moving forward on own free will in the journey of life.

We have to prepare to leave one resting house and move onto another. If something has to happen anyway, then why should it not happen with our own will? If it happens with our own wishes, then there is happiness in it. If it were possible to persevere and live forever, then it would be sensible to remain attached to the world. But this is impossible, so why not take care of things yourself that will happen anyway? In other words during the stage of celibacy one gathers worldly needs and uses it in the family life. Once the desires of the family are accomplished, then one must free oneself from worldly attachments. To accomplish this one has to enter into the stage of Vanprasth Ashram. Everyone lives and experiences married life, but in Vedic philosophy there are two other necessary stages for everyone, namely Brahmacharya and Vanprasth. Before married life, Brahmacharya is important, and after married life Vanprasth Ashram is essential. Sannyas Ashram was not essential for everyone nor should it be – until there is complete desire from within to devote the rest of life in God realisation.

In the olden days, when married people entered Vanprasth stage, they went and lived outside their village in huts that they constructed in the nearby forests. Outside every village or town there used to be rows of huts for Vanprasthis. Children and youths used to live in the villages or towns and the elderly Vanprasthis lived in the forest. They had undergone all types of experience in this world and knew all types of work. The youths, having gone in to the married stage of life, were undergoing new types of problems in life, hence they needed the assistance of the Vanprasthis. From time to time the youths used to visit the Vanprasthis and listen to their advice and then continue with their work. When some major problems confronted them, then also they used to consult the Vanprasthis who resolved the problems for them. Whenever the married people faced worldly worries, then also they went to the Vanprasthis who gave them spiritual advice and hence peace of mind.

In several countries, there is no such provision in the forests for the Vanprasthis. In such a situation, this stage of life can be fulfilled by living in the family environment.

## **15. Sannyās (संन्यास) Sanskar - Ashram (Renunciation Stage)**

### **What is Sannyas Ashram?**

Sannyas means leaving all worldly attachments, being completely impartial and moving around in this world for the welfare of all and removing unrighteousness while establishing righteousness. One who accepts Sannyas is called a Sannyasi.

Sannyas is the last stage in the four stages of life. Sannyas is the culmination of the objectives and wishes that have been expressed in the last three stages. The objective with which one had commenced life in Brahmacharya(celibacy) Ashram, that objective continues to be gradually fulfilled and is fully achieved in Sannyas Ashram. Sannyas does not mean

giving up all types of work. In essence, a Sannyasi is one who detaches oneself from worldly attachments, jealousy, gives up and forgets the feeling of yours and mine, and regards everyone as a family, travels around giving lessons of truth so that peace and happiness continues to dwell in the society.

One should only take up Sannyas when one has lived in Vanprasth Ashram (forestation stage) and removed all vices from oneself.

## **16. Antyeshti (अन्त्येष्टि) Sanskar (Funeral Sacrament)**

(Also referred to as **Antim Sanskar**)

### **An analysis on Death**

When the soul (atma) leaves the body, then the body is said to be dead. The death occurs of the body and not of the soul. Then what happens to the soul after it leaves the body?

After leaving the body the soul goes into the space above and in due course, is born again according to its deeds. In the Vedic verses which are recited during the funeral sacrament, it is repeatedly stated that the soul takes on new body after leaving the old body. Rishi Dayanand has chosen these verses with great care and skill. The meanings of the verses are given in the book Sanskar Chandrika. While conducting the funeral sacrament effort should be made to understand the depth of meanings of those verses because those verses state the deep truth about life.

### **Funeral Prayer**

O truthful, conscious, blissful God! Accept our salutation. You alone are the creator, regulator and protector of this universe. You are independent and most powerful in giving motion to all and in ruling over all, according to Your principles. Your rule which is just and unbiased is famous everywhere.

O God! Your creation is astonishing, Your deeds are unequalled, You make the joyous suffer and vice-versa but all this is based on such strict unchangeable rules, that ordinary beings are unable to understand the essence of it. You give out justice to all according to their deeds. You determine the species, age and the fruits of one's actions. When one's present life is to come to an end, then the soul leaves the body in accordance with Your rules. The same has happened to the soul, which has departed from this body.

O just God! We pray that You encourage the soul that has departed from the body to follow the righteous path of great seers who have themselves reached esteemed heights of knowledge and have shown the righteous path to thousands and through their brilliant intellect have shone like the sun and had the vision for the welfare of the country and the society. Furthermore, those seers meditated on the Vedic mantras, practiced them in life and followed strict rules and regulations and were duty bound.

O Almighty God! May the departed soul not fall prey to its senses on rebirth. May the soul recognize those undesirable qualities, like excessive attachment to senses, which bring about greed, causes the downfall of the soul, becomes the cause of bondage, and the cycle of life and death. May the soul not accept and become attached to them.

O God! You give out justice to all according to their deeds. We pray that You give encouragement to the departed soul to strive for achievement of salvation.

O God! Please give strength, good sense and peace to the children and the relatives of the deceased so that they may bear the loss and complete their journey of life righteously and become the subject of Your mercy and devoted to You.

### **Materials for funeral ceremony**

The materials, which have been listed from 1-8 below, are the minimum requirements. The quantity of ghee and other items should not be less than the quantities shown. If one can afford to buy more, then this should be done by all means. However, if one is financially



challenged (poor), then someone who can afford to buy should assist. Otherwise, the residents of the area and others should assist (such as friends). These items need to be burnt together with the body so that there is as little pollution as possible from the burning body. If ghee and other items are not used in adequate quantity then there will be foul smell in the atmosphere, as a result of which diseases could spread to the people. By using large quantities of these items there will be much benefit to all. This is a noble activity. The relatives and friends of the deceased who do such noble deeds would receive the fruits of their good action. Cremation is now being looked on more favorably by western cultures, as they are recognizing its importance of reducing the spread of various types of diseases. Therefore, facilities for this purpose are becoming more available.

#### MATERIALS

1. 20 liters pure ghee
2. 10 kg rice
3. 10 kg sugar
4. Four packets camphor
5. 24 packets Agarbatti
6. 4 dozen hawan samagree-Dasangam or Parimal brand (or other good quality)
7. Two dozen dry coconuts
8. Cinnamon – 1/2 kg, cardinum – 1/2 kg and cloves – 1/2 kg
9. One packet matches
10. Two large basins
11. Two buckets
12. Two round and two straight spoons with one meter each wooden handles tied on to them for easy handling.

#### **Conclusion**

ओ३म् सहनाववतु सहनौभुनक्तु सहवीर्यं करवावहैतेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु  
माविद्विषावहै ॥

ओ३म् शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Om Sahanaa Vavatu Sahanau Bhunaktu*

*Saha veeryam Karavaavahai*

*Tejas Vinaavadhee Tam astu*

*maa vidvishaavahai*

*Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi*

*Sanskrit to English Word Meaning:*

Saha- both; nau-us; avatu- may he protect; bhunaktu-may he nourish; viryam karavavahai-may we acquire the capacity; tejasvi-be brilliant; nau-for us; adhitam- what is studied; astu-let it be; maa vidvisavahai-may we not argue with each other.

O God, protect us both. Cause us both to enjoy the Supreme.

May we both exert together (to discover the true inner meaning of the scriptures).

May our studies be thorough and brilliant. May we never misunderstand each other.

O God, may all Your creation, in the visible and invisible worlds experience peace.